



Photo by Damian Bohannon
Master Sgt. Master Sgt. John W. Owen briefs members of the Air Force, the Air Force Reserve and the Army and Air National Guard who work long hours at the Kirtland AFB entry gates. Guard members have volunteered to stay on duty, helping protect the installation, while leaving educational pursuits and civilian careers.

Base gates guarded by multi-service members

BY JENNIFER E. WEST
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The “face” of the security forces at the Kirtland AFB entry gates is more than active duty Airmen in these times after the terrorist events of 2001.

Today’s keepers of the gates are a mix that includes members of the New Mexico Army National Guard’s Battery C and the 3/200 Air Defense Artillery and members in the Air National Guard’s 150th Fighter Wing.

In 2002, President George W. Bush, in support of Operation Enduring Freedom, activated many of the members involuntarily. Augmentation since then has been Army and Air National Guard and some Air Force Reservists who initially were activated because of the terrorist attacks. More recently, Guard members, some who normally would serve at Cannon or Holloman AFBs but who live in the Albuquerque area, have voluntarily stepped up to help.

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Lt. Col. Keith Harris
377th Security Forces Squadron commander



Photo by Jennifer E. West
Army National Guard Sgt. Martin Marquez of Belen normally serves the Guard as a security screener at the Albuquerque International Sunport. Sgt. Marque volunteered to continue active duty helping guard Kirtland AFB gates.



Kirtland AFB Inducts New Chiefs

The Kirtland Chief’s Group inducted Senior Master Sgts. Jeffrey Amos, 58th Maintenance Operations Squadron and Mark Hall, Air Force Operational Test and Evaluation Squadron, into the rank of Chief Master Sergeant at the Mountain View Club, Jan. 23. This formalizes their selection as they assume the new roles and duties associated with earning the Air Force’s highest enlisted rank. More than 130 TEAM KIRTLAND members joined their family and friends at the ceremony to congratulate the inductees. Participating in the ceremony are, from the left, Chief Master Sgt. Al Ludi, New Mexico Air National Guard command chief master sergeant, Chief Master Sgt. Jim Camp, 58th Special Operations Wing command chief master sergeant, Sergeant Amos, Sergeant Hall, Chief Master Sgt. Pam Derrow, 377th Air Base Wing command chief master sergeant and Chief Master Sgt. Fred Pugh, Kirtland Chief’s Group president.

“I couldn’t be prouder to have the support of the Army and Air National Guard and Air Force Reserve, all voluntarily working to support TEAM KIRTLAND,” Lt. Col. Keith Harris, 377th Security Forces Squadron commander, said.

“We’re a much better force protection team with this diversity, fresh personnel with fresh ideas,” Colonel Harris added. “In these challenging times, Kirtland AFB is a true testament of home station jointness. We’re using every available resource to get the job done.”

Guard members make the difference between meeting security forces mission requirements or not meeting them, said Senior Master Sgt. Brent Belcoff of 377th Security Forces Squadron. He oversees Individual Mobilization Augmentees working with the squadron.

“What people do not realize is that (the augmentees) that were or are working our installation gates either dropped out of college or temporarily halted their careers to proudly serve Kirtland AFB,” Sergeant Belcoff said.

Air National Guard’s Senior Airman Jacob Wootten from Albuquerque suspended his attendance at University of New Mexico to serve the Air Force.

“I was looking forward to helping out on the gates,” Airman Wootten said. “It’s pretty nice getting a chance to give them a hand and to give the active duty Air Force a hand.”

Airman Wootten has worked at the Maxwell gate about two weeks.

Sergeant Belcoff added that 30 newer members of the 150th Air National Guard joining the security forces personnel are civil engineers, security forces, services and facilities managers who also have volunteered to work 14-hour days four days weekly as part of meeting Kirtland AFB’s mission requirements.

Staff Sgt. Enrique Quesada of the 150th Air National Guard began working the gates about three weeks ago. A resident of Albuquerque, he is glad to serve and even happier he can serve from his hometown.

“The reason I’m doing this mostly is to help the military,” Sergeant Quesada said. “I realize how badly they need the help. I’m glad to be here. But I’m glad I’m home when I’m off duty. I can go home and see my family.”

Although Sergeant Quesada leaves his job as a case-worker at the University of New Mexico Hospital’s children’s psychiatric outpatient department, he values the opportunity to grow in his military career.

“I can expand my knowledge, learn more skills than I ever thought I was going to learn. I can meet new people and learn more about being a special forces member.

“Sometimes we take (gate work) for granted but it is a hard job, 12- to 15-hour days,” the sergeant noted.

Army Guard Specialist Michael Vigil, who lives in Isleta and serves in a Belen, N.M., Guard unit HHB 3200 of Charlie Battery, said when his colonel informed his unit that the Air Force was short on people to meet the mission, he was ready to serve.

“It’s working out pretty good,” Specialist Vigil said. “Sometimes the hours are long and the days can be kind of miserable. But there are good people working out here. So, the days go by fast and we rotate the shifts.”

Vigil said his civilian employer, Wal-Mart in Los Lunas, is supportive of his Guard service for his country even though he expects to be absent two years in the mission.

Army Guard Sgt. Martin Marquez lives in Belen and is part of the Belen Guard unit. Activated after Sept. 11, 2001, he was released from service about a year before reactivating. His regular Guard duty is as a security screener at the Albuquerque International Sunport.

“I enjoy doing this,” Sergeant Marquez said. “I’m glad I can do my part for the United States and for my fellow man. I enjoy being around people and am glad I can help make other people feel safer.”